

## I Don't Understand by GrifficScribbles

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Angst, Autistic Jonathan Byers, Bilingual Character(s), Billy Hargrove & Maxine "Max" Mayfield Have a Good Relationship, Billy Hargrove Is Bad at Feelings, Billy Hargrove Speaks Spanish, Bisexual Steve Harrington, F/F, F/M, Fluff, Gay Billy Hargrove, Good Babysitter Steve Harrington, Hurt/Comfort, I Wrote This Instead of Sleeping, I have fun plans for this, Italian Steve Harrington, Jonathan uses ASL, M/M, Multi, Neil Hargrove Being an Asshole, Neil Hargrove's A+ Parenting, Self-Indulgent, Smart Billy Hargrove, Susan Hargrove is kinda cool in this one, Tags Are Fun, Tags May Change, What Have I Done, i couldn't even begin to explain this, like neopolitan ice cream but fanfiction, please stop me, these boys need love

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Heather Holloway, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Nancy Wheeler, Neil Hargrove, Robin Buckley, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove & Heather Holloway, Billy Hargrove & Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Eleven | Jane Hopper/Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Jonathan Byers & Nancy Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Billy Hargrove, Jonathan Byers/Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Jonathan Byers/Steve Harrington, Robin Buckley & Steve Harrington, Robin Buckley/Heather Holloway, Will Byers & Billy Hargrove

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**Summary:**

In which Billy, Steve, and Jonathan all have a hard time finding

people that understand them. In the literal and metaphorical sense. They're all bilingual and assume that they're doomed to speak alone in Hawkins. They're also more complicated than the average person, but who's to say they won't come to an understanding with the help of very nosy lesbian?

(aka Billy, Steve, and Jonathan are all semi-secretly bilingual and Robin finds out)

## 1. 1. Donde esta la biblioteca?

### Author's Note:

Let it be known that this is entirely self-indulgent, but I got the idea and now it won't leave.

Translations will be in the end notes.

Hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoy writing it (:

### Summary for the Chapter:

Billy gets a cryptic note from a girl in his history class.

(2,458 words)

If Billy Hargrove had a least favorite time of the day, it would be 7 am. Not just because that's when he has to wake up to get himself and Max to school, but also because the temperature is awful, not unlike the rest of winter. He had never had many issues with winter before. That was also because winter wasn't that much of a thing in California. Hawkins, Indiana was something of uncharted territory for him in the way of- well everything but especially the weather. Just like 7 am. It's always too warm for proper bundling and too cold to dress like a normal human being, not that he really did that in the first place. Because of the January weather, he had been forced by the consistently freezing temperatures to stick to wearing t-shirts with his jackets, of which he bought a new one over the break so he could actually *retain* some of his body heat throughout the day.

It is also at 7 am that he is always reminded that what little peace he may have met while he slept was never his to keep. Always waking up and hoping that today would be a good day, no matter how unlikely that was. It's stressful to be constantly playing with fire, especially when you don't know what kind of fire it is that day. There are so many different kinds and ways you're supposed to put them out, but if you can't tell until you've already been burnt then what's the point of even trying for the extinguisher. In Billy's case, the fire is Neil. Some days it's a smolder and others, it's an outright explosion. Waking up at 7 am just means trying to guess what it'll be that day.

But he's awake now and there's not really enough time to lie in bed and worry about what's already likely to happen. And now he has to get ready for the first day of the spring semester. He doesn't feel like trying too hard today so he just sticks to the usual routine of whatever t-shirt he reaches first- or maybe the second so that he doesn't smell like hot garbage. Gotta love the smell of workout clothes. His usual jeans are tight in the thigh but loose toward the cuff because only a whack job tries to wear straight-cut jeans with boots. Tending to his hair was usually the hardest task given the fact his hair was naturally curly. First running his fingers through it to get rid of any tangles.

'Really glad I washed it yesterday and not today' he sighs at even the idea of trying to dry his hair before school.

Billy runs his hands through the now vaguely tamed mane again, but with the addition of some hair oil to keep the curl gods appeased. After scrunching it, he just gives it a few puffs of hairspray and maybe a bit more for a straggler or two. He adds some Pour Homme aftershave to the usual haunts before the final once over. He grabs his newest addition to his collection of coats, still a leather jacket just with some insulation. Who said you couldn't have both fashion and function? And if the chill permeating into his room from his lightly frosted window was anything to go off of, he'd need it.

Having heard the distinct click and then rattle of the locks on his door being opened just before he started nailing down stragglers, he opened it and started the first leg of the ever precarious journey to his car. From the hall, he can hear Neil turn the page of the *Hawkins Post* and Susan and Max's dishes meeting their silverware. He can see the sleep still deeply rooted in Max's eyes.

"Anything good today, Dad?" he asks as the man in question makes a face at whatever article he's reading.

"Just the usual drivel that comes from a town like this," he says with a slight turn of the head to acknowledge Billy, without actually looking away from the paper.

"I heard they're starting construction on a new mall, here in Hawkins," Max says apparently having been resuscitated by her bowl

of Rice Krispies. How she eats that is beyond him. It tastes like crunchy paper.

"Just another place for people to waste their time and money, but at least there'll be more jobs to keep troublesome kids in line," Neil adds a pointed look toward Billy to make his point known.

Though at this moment, Susan makes her own presence known to put out the sparks before they catch.

"It'll be nice to have somewhere for kids to go during the summer though."

"Mhm," comes Neil's inattentive hum of a reply. It's at this point that Billy goes to the counter to pick up the paper bag with his lunch in it that Susan had convinced Neil to let her start making for him and Max so that they didn't have to waste money on school food. How did such an angel give birth to the demon that likes Rice Krispies cereal?

Billy starts slipping on his coat before looking at his watch, already knowing that it would be 7:20. These things become routine after so many years, after all.

"I'm gonna go get the engine warmed up. We're leaving by 7:30," he says already heading for the door. It's a Monday, so he'd have his easier classes. Not to mention that it's the first day back from what felt like the longest winter break he'd ever experienced. But now being an entire week into 1985, it was almost a breath of relief to be going back to school. It was an excuse to get him out of the house that he wouldn't have to script a lie for later, so the place was alright in his book. It's just the people that seem to find every way to grind his gears.

Turning the key in the ignition and hearing the Camaro purr a *Good morning* makes something in his bones just feel that much lighter. Since he's waiting and in an almost decent mood, he decided to be nice and turn on the heat so they don't have to freeze their asses on the way to school. It's only another few minutes before Max joins him, skateboard in tow, and immediately putting her hand to the heaters.

"I miss the sun. Whose idea was winter? I think they need to be fired," she rattles once she's settled into her seat. This pulls a short huff of laughter from Billy at the thought of someone inventing winter and being fired for it eons later by some punk little redhead with an attitude problem. However, that's about the only conversation made on the short drive to the school. It's not a comfortable silence, but it's not exactly tense or awkward either.

Billy makes the decision to have Max pull out the Foreigner album she had bought him in '81, when it was released. 4 was the title and it was released on July 2nd, not that she had known that she'd given him an early birthday present. Billy was and still is perfectly content with it staying that way. He doesn't need people having a day to use as an excuse to be nice to him or pretend they're his friends. That's what funerals were for, if he got one. Still, this album is a nice memory for him and hopefully for Max, too. Thinking about the weather and 4 and California puts him in the mood for using his Spanish, but it's not like there's anyone else here, in Assfuck, Nowhere that speaks Spanish. So suffering, it is.

Like clockwork, they get there at 7:45. The two *step* -siblings leave the car in the same silence they had traveled in and make their way to their respective schools a whole 15 minutes before the first bell. As predicted, the day passes with relative ease. Homeroom lasting the usual 20 minutes to welcome everyone back for the second semester. He only actually knows two people in his homeroom. One of them, he's fairly certain still hates his guts and has every right to- Steve Harrington and the other, whom Billy has surprisingly little tolerance for despite how often they're seen together- Tommy Hagan.

After that came his normal classes that he has on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays- the days that don't suck for the dyslexic. First is shop, then he has advanced biology because he took regular bio in Cali and actually didn't hate it. The material was surprisingly easy if you took the notes right. After that was finally lunch. He usually settled for eating on the hood of his car and smoking, but given that the temperature is currently ice degrees, that's probably a bad idea. Cafeteria it is.

Shuffling into the large hall isn't the hard part. Finding a table with people that he doesn't hate and that don't hate him is. Instead of just

enduring Tommy's grating voice or weird stares from people who are essentially strangers, he finds a somehow empty table near the middle-right for him to eat his food in relative peace.

Lunch comes and goes and now he's itching for someone to speak Spanish with *and* a cigarette cause an entire room of people staring at you tends to put you on edge. But it's fine. He has study hall now and the only thing he has to do is translate his notes from Biology into English so he can take the English set home and leave the Spanish set in his locker. Is it twice the work? Yes. Does it keep kids from sticking their noses in his work to cheat off him? Also yes. It's honestly a win-win. He absorbs the material better and gets to satisfy the itch he always has to use his second language, even if it's kind of like the hand job of language practice. It works, but it's not what he actually wants.

After his, frankly, boring study hall filled with pretty much nothing comes gym. It's not hard to tell it's one of his favorites. He considered doubling up on it when he found out he had an extra spot open in his schedule, but he opted for a second study hall and a free period instead. Today's isn't anything too special. They warm up, play some game or another and then he's home free. The rest of his day is much like it started- tense, but overall uneventful. For a day that started at 7 am, this went pretty well. No fires and no fists.

Tuesday starts much the same. 7 am, clothes, skip breakfast, get in the car and smoke, though this time he and Max dramatically sing to whatever garbage is on the radio during the drive because they weren't feeling any of the cassettes, get to school at 7:45, and then starts his Tuesday/Thursday schedule. It starts with first period history with Mrs. Click. There were still very few familiar faces in this class, a grand total of one- once again, Steve Harrington. Mrs. Click has a strange way of teaching. She is a very bouncy person, but history is not a super bouncy subject. This leads to some... Interesting things being said like such gems as "Who's this Reagan guy?" and "Oh, Ebola lady," making for some decent entertainment, at least.

Billy is listening to Click go on another tangent when he notices the girl to his left- the one with the wavy hair and freckles that spends a conspicuous amount of her time staring at Tammy Thompson- lean over to look at his notes. Billy snickers, but keeps the rest of his

laughter internalized because his notes are still in Spanish. He notices her eyes go wide for a second before she returns to her own airspace and writes her own damn notes.

Unfortunately for him, he's given some instant karma when a note pops up on his desk from the same girl and it nearly gives him a heart attack. He manages to not jump too much, but still freezes for a good couple of seconds. He unfolds the note from its paper football form and it reads: "*encuéntrame en la biblioteca. Almuerzo*

*-clase de historia, el asiento detrás de Harrington "*

"The hell does this chick want with me in the library?" Though he's still reeling from the fact that the note is in Spanish, Billy looks at her from the corner of his vision and sees her doing the same, so he nods as a way to tell her he'll be there and she returns the gesture.

Well, this has been a weird day and it's not even noon. He gets the normalcy he was hoping for when his second study hall rolls around. He doesn't miss the pointed stare from Carol Perkins that's probably asking him why he sat alone yesterday, but he ignores it anyway. Translating his History notes was as tedious as ever, despite the occasional chuckle when he reads back whatever quotes he had written this time around. Having history first thing in the morning has produced some weird ones over the year, but he only writes down the ones that get either himself or the class really laughing, no matter who said it.

Lunch comes both all too quickly and not quickly enough. He's had a weird history girl-shaped itch in his brain that needs scratching, but he dreads whatever conversation they're about to have. Especially since it's apparently about the fact that they both speak Spanish, something he would rather be kept quiet to the rest of the school to keep Neil from finding out and giving him hellfire.

He makes his way there, not after a wrong turn or two and being too stubborn to ask for directions. There is no way you're getting him to say even the translated version of the age-old sentence that everyone learns on their first day of Spanish. Making his way to the history section, he doesn't see the weird chick, but he figures he can be generous and wait for at least a couple of minutes.



It takes all of 30 seconds for her to practically materialize behind him and give him the second heart attack of the day, in which he doesn't even get to try to keep himself from jumping. She hadn't even said or done anything that intentionally spooks people, let alone him. She just showed up, eyes all intense, and said more than asked,

“Tu hablas Espanol.”

The space directly after his startle was filled with his brain freezing up and vaguely playing the dial-up noise.

## 2. Habla Ingles?

### Summary for the Chapter:

Billy and Robin have an...interesting conversation  
and Billy meets Ms. Byers.  
(3,144 words)

### Notes for the Chapter:

Mild regret. I had so many translations in this one..  
Oh well. Hope you guys have as much fun reading it  
as I had writing it (:

“Tu hablas Espanol.”

So not only does this weird chick from his first-period history class read and write it, but she speaks Spanish pretty well, too. It almost feels like he goes into a comfortable autopilot to respond.

“Si. Y tu tambien lo hablas, aparentemente,” he shakes his head in not-quite-confusion while responding in a hushed voice so as not to be heard using the language and also because this is a library and he is not gonna be that asshole. She looks at him with a mischief in her eyes that almost reminds him of Max whenever she got one of her “ideas” and it would be unsettling, if not for the fact that part of him breathes out some relief at the fact he was able to *speak* the second tongue.

“I knew there was something actually cool about you, California. I’m Robin. Robin Buckley,” she smiles the whole way through and it reaches her eyes. It’s like she’s genuinely happy to meet him—something Billy isn’t even remotely used to. He even finds himself giving her part of one back.

“Billy Hargrove. Glad I’m finally not the only one around here that has some fuckin culture,” he gives her hand a firm shake as he considers spending the rest of the conversation in Spanish. He decides against this cause he wants to move this to the cafeteria so he can eat. He also wants to tell her that he’s seen her staring at Tammy

Thompson, but feels like that might backfire cause he could either be very wrong or be a little too right and make her bite back with the fact that he's spent his fair share of time watching Harrington.

He knows she can tell he's thinking. She has a look like she's ready to give her two cents but is also waiting for him to say something else. He doesn't, so she takes her cue.

"Hey, so if you're done... brooding or whatever, could we maybe take this to the cafeteria? Cause I'm starving and, as fun as it sounds, I really don't want to eat paper and the souls of children. Ok, maybe just the paper," she starts half-rambling as they already head for the door. If she wants to go to the cafeteria, that works for him.

"Yeah sure. Let me stop by my locker first so I can get my food and shit," Billy says, still doing his best to seem like he's not at least some part excited at the prospect of having someone actually interesting around. The time they spend traversing the halls is spent trying to navigate the way to his locker in Spanish at a volume just above a mutter and cracking jokes about their various teachers in English so they could speak at a higher volume and avoid too much suspicion.

Reaching the cafeteria, it's unsurprisingly full again today. The pair find a table that's not too populated and Billy just uses the expression he knows reads as *scram*. The two kids sitting there do as such. Robin takes a seat just before Billy and continues their conversation from earlier about how they've got to be the only two people in the entire town of Hawkins that speak a second language- or second, third, and fourth in Robin's case. That was a fact that had Billy's eyebrows raising in impress, surprise, and amusement. She probably had all sorts of fun dicking with people with that.

"Yknow. If you ever need someone to yell in Spanish with, most of my schedule is free. Except for Wednesdays and Thursdays cause that's when I have band and rehearsals. You seem like the kind of guy that would yell at people in Spanish."

Fuck. She had him figured out to that level after only knowing him for a whole 15 minutes. Though if she knew Spanish was his default for when he's angry or just upset in general, that made him want to know what her language settings were.

“Yeah? We both know you’re not wrong so I won’t even try to lie on this one. You have a language you yell in? There’s gotta be at least one you switch to for some reason or another, freckle face,” the nickname isn’t used with any mocking or malice, but the sort of teasing that friends use. They’re not friends, though. Billy doesn’t have friends. Granted, that’s kind of his fault for keeping people at arm’s length to avoid them questioning anything. Still, this feels almost comfortable- like they could be friends if he wasn’t an asshole...or followed around by Tommy Hagan like he fed a stray.

“I don fink any muhilingal person can go wifout having some reason,” she started through a bite of her lunch that had been damn near inhaling, “or another to use what they know. I just so happen to be like you and yell in Spanish, but I also cry in French- yes that’s as sad as it sounds- and I haven’t had much reason to use the Italian just yet,” and she was right crying in French really does sound sad- both literally being a depressing thing to watch and just something that sounds very- well, sad.

Her eyes filling back up with what seems to be her trademark mischief at the mention of the Italian isn’t lost on him, but he decides to not press it for now. Instead, he just chuckles at the thought of his strange... friend sitting on the floor of her room sobbing about some boy- or Tammy Thompson- and speaking in random bouts of French over it. He’s not used to feeling comfortable enough to give a response that’s so close to an actual laugh, but it’s nice.

“At least you’re aware of how completely depressing it would be to hole yourself up in your room and cry over some chick while lamenting over her in French,” no time like the present to make the fact that also possesses the weird radar that only other queers seem to have known.

He’s not dumb enough to say it at such a volume that it’s heard by anyone not at their table, but she freezes nonetheless. She eyes him suspiciously before her eyes flash with the realization of how he came to know that that’s probably exactly how she spends her Friday nights.

“How long?” There’s mild panic lacing her voice.

“Don’t worry, freckles, I’m not gonna go spouting it off to anyone.” He watches as her eyes and shoulders soften from her breath of relief. Well, no time like the present to tell her they’re more similar than either of them initially thought. “Why would I want to rat out one of my own?”

Guess today’s sharing day. She immediately shoots back up, filled with tension from the sheer shock of it. He gives her a look, ice blue meeting a blue that resembles an ocean of storms. He then pulls a navy blue handkerchief from his back left pocket and swipes it over his mouth to get any food away from the week-old split there. This puts her at ease through understanding, once again, as he puts the fabric back in its intended pocket.

“That explains Harrington,” she smirks like the devil she may actually be.

“Yeah, well, that explains Tammy Thompson,” he smirks in kind.

She gives him a light sock in the arm before squinting with a tentative “Touche.”

He doles one back, still being careful to not hurt her because he knows he’s built like a fucking brick wall. They’re only broken out of their light conversation by the shriek of the bell. They start saying vague goodbyes, only to realize that they’re still walking in the same direction through the halls.

“Who do you have next?” Billy asks, already suspecting the answer.

“Ingles avanzado, y tu?” she says with a light laugh in her voice.

“Mi tambien.”

They both smile as they continue toward Mrs. Haynes’ class because who doesn’t talk about their English class en Espanol?

They continue laughing about it until they have to race to class to avoid being late.

“I totally won that,” Robin smiles, walking backward into the class.

"Whatever you say, Buckles," Billy gives a jokingly dismissive shake of the head.

"It's Buckl ey , asshole."

He smirks as they reach their seats, not blind to the smattering of odd stares coming from their classmates. Luckily, there's not really any assigned seating with Haynes, just the sort of unspoken rhythm that people fall into...and the occasional little shit being moved away from someone for being a little shit. So the two can get a table together. The teacher likes teamwork, so her class is made up of tables with students paired together for collaborative purposes.

Robin takes the seat to the left. This, however, doesn't last because as soon as Billy takes out his notes and gets ready to start writing about whatever book they'd be starting, she makes her opinion known.

"Nope. Nu-uh. Not having any of your left-handed bullshit, now switch spots with me so I don't take an elbow to the ribs," she's already standing. He just does his best to keep from smiling and trades her seats, having already known this would come. He can't decide if this was funnier or the alternative of watching her suffer through an entire class of elbow wrestling him for reign over the center of the table.

They spend the class both actually paying attention and sliding a piece of lined paper back and forth with their continued conversation on it. It's not hard to tell whose handwriting is whose. Contrary to popular belief, Billy's is only messy in that his hand has a hard time writing at the speed of his thoughts; otherwise, it's pretty uniform. Robin's is something of a mess, but it has a weird kind of charm to it-like it's supposed to be messy because if it's not it just looks wrong.

The book they're starting the semester with is *Pride and Prejudice* and it's something Billy would never admit to having read before, let alone *enjoyed* . No, in fact, he had never read it and certainly not 3 times before now having to read and analyze it for class. Mrs. Haynes started the class by explaining a bit about the book and the characters and then handed out copies to the students. Billy would absolutely deny any accusations, especially from one Robin Buckley, that he had given the book back to the teacher on account of already

having his own copy.

Robin's snickers could be heard from his place down the hall as he headed to the parking lot for his free period. His plans are simple enough for the rest of the day- swing by the general store and pick up a couple of things and then wait the rest of it out either at the quarry or in the parking lot. It would depend on how he was feeling at the moment. After picking up Max, they would head home and he'd give her another Spanish lesson since she seemed to be picking it up relatively well and they would have the house to themselves for a bit.

When she found out he knew the language, she had practically begged him to teach it to her. It had taken him a while to agree on account of his dad being a racist piece of shit that would kill him if he found out Billy had "corrupted" her, but he finally agreed by simply telling her that she would need a new notebook for the new language arts course she signed up for over lunch one Saturday in early December. That was his apology. That and the new skateboard he had gotten her for Christmas, but that was to replace the one he'd broken. Spanish lessons were just because he's been a dick since they moved.

Waiting for his engine- and the rest of the car- to heat up was by far the worst part of driving in winter, second only to the fear of fishtailing on the ice that sometimes populated the roads.

Pulling out of the parking lot, he could see Harrington's BMW making its way back in. Not that he cared that he apparently had a free period right before his. What he did with his time was his business, as interesting as it seemed to be to that weird part of his head that held an almost morbid curiosity for the boy he'd beaten to a pulp.

Making his way to Melvald's was simple enough and now that he's inside, he can just get his shit and head to the quarry. He picks up a bag of Skittles for Max and a bag of Sour Patch Kids for himself. He still isn't sure how to feel about the design change because, in his opinion, the aliens that they used to be in the 70s were much better. But hey, they're still the same old "sour, then sweet" so it's not that big a deal.

He approaches the counter and asks the lady waiting there for a pack

of reds and she obliges before starting to ring everything up.

“That’s a nasty split you’ve got in that lip. You get in a fight, Billy?” Because of course, she knows his name. It’s Hawkins and he’s the shiny new kid from California.

“Something like that, ma’am.” He gives a short nod but doesn’t leave because he can tell she’s got something else to say. He’s developed a bit of a sixth sense for these things over the years.

“I heard you came to my house looking for your sister a couple of months ago...I think it was the same night as one of my plates went missing,” she says with a motherly smile. The universal sign for “I know you did something, but it’s kind of funny” before continuing with “Yknow if you ever get into ‘something like a fight’ again, you’re welcome to drop by for a bit. Plus, Will’s had nothing but good things to say about you since November.”

“Thanks, Ms. Byers,” Billy really doesn’t know what to do with all of that, but he nods and is left to wonder why she knows how to take an excuse without actually taking it and why her youngest was talking to her about him. He chalks it up to the kid being friends with Max and moves on.

“Just Joyce is fine. Only authority figures and strangers call me ‘Ms. Byers.’”

He nods at this and makes his way to the door. “See ya later, Joyce.”

As he leaves with his things, he throws a wave over his shoulder and heads back into the biting, January air. Getting into the car that he had decided to leave on, knowing he’d only be a couple minutes, he tosses his bag into the passenger seat. Once he’s backed out of the lot, he starts thinking more about his conversation with Mama Byers and he feels the space under his skin twist and turn with the knowledge that she had seen right through him. He doesn’t feel like going to the quarry anymore and opts for just waiting at the school.

Once parked, he quickly digs out the fresh pack of cigarettes from the back in the seat beside him to place in his breast pocket after placing the last of the old pack between his lips. Lighting it and taking that



first, relief-inducing drag almost feels like muscle memory at this point. He wants to talk to Robin so he can finally get rid of the familiar coils of anger that are trying to make their way through his muscles and bones and veins. He wasn't used to being so...seen, especially on a first meeting and *especially* twice in one day.

He soon finds himself ranting in Spanish, even without Robin's presence there to lighten his mood and respond.

“¿Quién diablos se cree que es? Actuando como si me conociera después de verme durante treinta segundos. Ella no sabe una mierda de mí y se va a quedar así,” he occasionally punches or grips his steering wheel to emphasise his point to himself. He was strangely both unaware and hyper aware of the familiar sting of tears moving up through his sinuses and under his eyes. If he hadn't been fully aware of it before, he certainly is now.

He felt a tear run over his cheek and was immediately brought out of his ranting, interrupting himself with a simple “Mierda!” He nearly punches himself in the face with the speed he wipes it away, along with the trail it left behind. He takes a longer drag than he normally would so that he can justify his watery eyes, more to himself than anyone else. As he exhales the familiar burn from his lungs and esophagus, he does his best to blink the rebel waters away. A few manage to make a run for it, but he doesn't bother after that first one.

“Dios, ¿qué triste es mi puta vida? Estoy fumando y llorando en mi auto en el estacionamiento de la escuela como una perra a la que no la invitaron al baile de graduación,” he laughs at himself, unable to escape the mental image of himself in a prom dress crying to some shit like *Careless Whisper* or *Total Eclipse of the Heart* .

He finishes his cigarette and gets a good couple drags into a second when he hears the bells ring at the schools. He puts in the cassette of the Mad Max soundtrack that he plays whenever he and Max do something together that could probably get them in trouble.

He watches her skate down the hill, to the car. Her face turning to the mischievous one that he associates with both this music and, as of today, Robin. It's at this moment that he realizes that he needs to do everything in his power to make sure that those two never *ever* meet.

He internally shudders at the thought before unlocking the passenger side door to let her in from the cold.

“Habla Inglés, pájaro de mierda?” his grin is shit eating as he subtly tells her just what it is that they’re doing today and she returns it before digging through the bag with the candy in it.

“No, hermano. Solo hablo Español,” she grins at both the conversation and the sight of the Skittles waiting for her. She takes out both packages and throws the sour ones at Billy.

“How you eat those is beyond me. It tastes like they’re burning your mouth away.”

He just laughs and tells her “That’s the fun of them,” before zooming out of the parking lot

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Translations:

You speak Spanish

Yes. And you do too, apparently

Advanced English. And you?

Me too

Who the hell does she think she is? Acting like she knows me after seeing me for thirty seconds. She don't know shit about me and she's gonna stay like this

God how sad is my life? I'm smoking and crying in my car in the school parking lot like a bitch didn't get invited to prom

Speak English, shitbird?

No, brother. I only speak Spanish

(I'm sorry about the lack of accents my computer doesn't always get them. Also sorry about my garbage Spanish. I, much like Billy, haven't really been able to practice in a while)

### 3. Eres mi padre?

#### Summary for the Chapter:

Billy gets caught teaching Max Spanish and pays for it. Susan then comes to help tend to his wounds.  
(3,045 words)

#### Notes for the Chapter:

I hope you appreciate that I spent over two hours staring at pictures of the Hargrove house so I could figure out the floor plan. 1) who designed this house I just wanna talk and 2) I still had to guess at about 35% of it.

Also major TW for this chapter because there are scenes of physical and emotional abuse, as well as dissociation, depicted in it.

I hope you enjoy this chapter as much as I suffered writing it (:

“¿Eres mi padre?” Billy asks, trying to keep from grinning like an idiot at his fun with annoying his sister.

“No! Soy tu hermana,” Max is trying to sound annoyed, but the laughter is audible in her voice, “estupido hermano.”

“¿Estás segura?” He drags out the latter word in a mocking tone and pushes the readers Susan bought him a few months back further up his nose. He usually wears his prescription sunglasses that he saved up for so long for, but that’s just when he’s driving. Otherwise, he suffers in silence. In this case, though, it would be kind of hard to help his sister spell things right if he can only see the oven clock or the front door.

He could see Max thinking, trying to figure out exactly what it is Billy had asked her. She’s already doing really well considering she has only had a few lessons. She’s also visibly refraining from looking at her notes, opting to get it from memory, not that he expects her to. Sometimes he would throw a new word at her as a way to broaden

her vocabulary a little quicker and give her more that she would be able to use in conversation. How many times in their life does someone say “This is a table”? Contrary to what your middle school Spanish teacher might have you believe, the number is very low.

“Umm...Estas is ‘are you’ I know that, but segura..segura, segura, segura, segura...” Billy is proud of the squirt for trying to figure it out before immediately looking at her notes or asking him whenever she gets a new word or forgets one.

“Segura...you did the thing again didn’t you,” she groans through the accusation and he can’t help but laugh.

“You caught me. Segura is the feminine form of seguro, which means sure. Esta stays the same, but..” he trails off, gesturing to the younger of the two of them for a completion of the phrase.

“‘Use the feminine version with girls and the masculine version with boys’,” she rolls her eyes through the repetition and he just rewards her with his most innocent smile. As a proper form of reward, she steals one of his Sour Patch Kids and instantly regrets it. Max hates sour candy and had apparently forgotten that that happens to be Billy’s favorite. She had devoured her Skittles on the car ride back from the school and Billy just laughed at the hideous brown the candy had turned her tongue.

Max is very obviously trying to keep a straight face, but he sees right through it and snickers at her suffering.

“Ok ok. You’ve proved that you’re tough. Now are you gonna actually swallow it or spit it out?” He smiles like the smug little shit he knows he is behind his glass of water.

Max’s teeth are gritted as she glares her response at him, “Spitters are quitters, right?”

To which Billy promptly inhales some of his water and starts choking because of all the things he was expecting his kid sister to say, that wasn’t one. Though, it really should have been considering he practically raised the little shit over the last 4 years.

“Jesucristo perra,” he says on an exhale after catching his breath.

“Tú te haces esto, amigo,” she pretends to console him.

“Close,” Billy is still doing his best to get his breath fully back under control, “but your grammar is a bit off. I get what you’re trying to say though. The ‘actual’ way to say it would be ‘Te haces esto a ti mismo, amigo.’ Ti mismo means ‘yourself’ instead of say-” His instruction is cut off by the sound of his father clearing his throat.

Both young heads shoot up to meet his gaze in nothing but pure fear at being caught by the man that can be described as nothing less than sinister at this moment. Neil stands in the space between the kitchen and the dining room, having come in through the door at the side of the house like usual. It’s only when Billy takes off his glasses and looks at the oven clock that he realizes that his dad is home early, which is far from the norm for the man.

“What’s going on here?”

He looks Billy with eyebrows raised, expecting an answer, but the boy knows that nothing he could say would explain why he, let alone Max, was speaking Spanish. Max jumps in to try and save her brother, but he knows it’s not going to help much, if at all.

“It’s not his fault! I asked him to teach me!”

“And he should have declined. No pleasant, polite lady, like yourself, should be speaking that trash. This is the United States, where the people speak English and under this roof, it is going to stay that way. Isn’t that right, Billy?” The man’s tone leaving no room for argument from either of them.

“That wasn’t a rhetorical question. Now, isn’t. That. Right, Billy,” he spends the entire time staring straight through Max, at Billy who is doing his best to maintain proper posture and a straight face.

“Yes, sir.”

“Maxine, please go to your room. I need to have a conversation with Billy, here. He seems to have forgotten how to be a good example for his sister,” Neil’s gaze never once leaves Billy, despite addressing

Max. She turns to look at Billy, silently asking if she should really go, but he knows better- that he doesn't have a say. Billy clenches his jaw and jerks his head in the direction of her room, telling her to go.

Thankfully, she does, but not without muttering something to the effect of "It's Max and I'm *not* a lady."

Once the sound of Max shutting her door louder than Billy could ever get away with rings through the house, Neil rounds the dining room table and grabs Billy by the hair and takes him through the other side of the room. Billy already knows where they're going. They take a left, as opposed to the right that Max took to her room, and then a right, leaving them standing in front of the basement door.

Billy holds his hand out for the keys soon to be dropped into it. His dad always makes him unlock the basement door. Billy figures it's some sick power play. The stairs are always dark, the first light source being an uncovered light bulb at the base of them. Neil pulls the string before all but throwing Billy toward the center of the room where the spare couch used to be before the boy had moved it up to his room so he had somewhere other than his bed to do his homework or read.

By the time Billy is fully upright and turning around to face his father, the man in question is already right there and slapping his son across the face. 'He must be pissed if he's going for the face.' Billy's thoughts are intact for the time being, despite the pull and sting of his lip splitting back open.

However, Neil wastes very little time in grabbing Billy by the collar and turning them around to shove him into the nearest wall a good couple times.

"What did I say about being a good brother to Maxine? Do you remember what a good brother is, Billy?" Neil's voice is still deceptively calm, but Billy can see the sheer malice behind it.

"A good brother is kind and respecting, keeps his sister from harm and trouble, and takes responsibility for her actions- no matter who is to blame," his jaw feels stiff, lips downturned, as he says the words that have been so often drilled into his mind since his father

remarried. But he can tell that this is far from over. At this point, it doesn't matter what his father wants to hear. He just has to take it.

"That's right. Very good," however, there's no pride to be found in those words, especially coming from Neil.

Before he can think much else, Billy finds himself being thrown to the floor, face down. He tries, in vain, to catch himself and avoid breaking his nose. He doesn't feel the telltale crack, which he supposes is a good thing, but he can feel his dominant wrist fill with the familiar tides of pain. Billy's eyes ache from how hard he clamps them shut while he tries to keep his vocal chords in check.

This is made that much harder when he rolls onto his side to take the weight off of his- probably sprained- wrist and takes a swing of Neil's boot straight to the gut. It's not hard enough to make him lose his lunch, but Billy does find himself coughing and curling in on himself on instinct. He is then met with another kick, this time, to the ribs.

It's been a while since Neil's gotten this intense, but Billy supposed he had it coming in this case. Last week was made up mostly of burning glares and a few firm slaps, as well as the punch that split his lip which was earned through not having Max home in time for curfew.

No, he deserves it this time. He was leading Max astray and got caught. This is his fault.

Billy feels his father's presence behind his head just before the left side of his hair is grabbed as a handle for pushing the opposite side of his face into the cement floor. Once, twice, and a final third time. That's gonna bruise like hell.

"I hope this has taught you something about being a good, kind," Neil pauses to yank his son's head up so he can speak closer to the boy's ear, "and respecting brother you are. Now you are going to go to your room and will not be joining us for dinner. You will start by writing an apology to Maxine for being dishonest to her and disrespectful to her mother and then you're going to write lines until lights out at 9 pm, at which point I will close and lock your door. Do I make myself clear, Billy?"

Speaking is a bit harder than normal at the angle his head is currently being held at, but Billy knows he has to reply or risk his nose actually being broken on the cement below him. "Yes, sir."

This seems to be satisfactory because his dad then helps him stand, walk up the stairs, and then to the small couch in his room. He is left with an almost gentle pat on the shoulder and a smile that barely reaches the man's mouth, let alone his eyes.

Billy doesn't really waste much time before doing as he's told. He tests out writing with his usual hand, but finds that the pain that seems to have taken up a less than comfortable residence in his wrist has some kind of problem with that. Right hand it is. It's shaky and abnormal, but not foreign. This isn't the first time one of his wrists has gotten some kind of fucked up, let alone from his dad, so he starts writing.

He knows that Neil will read over it before instructing him to give it to Max tomorrow, so he doesn't try to put in some hidden meaning or something stupid like that. Instead he just signs it as best he can and moves on to 2 more hours of lines. He knows what Neil wants him to write this time, just as he's always known. Whenever he's made to write lines, there's a theme of the lesson that preceded it. Today's just happened to be the well-known "*I will be a good brother*" over and over, into a monotonous void.

With the help of his mind separating from his body, 9 pm comes sooner than he thought it would. It's only when he feels the swing of air from the door closing that he begins to come back to himself. Taking a full breath for the first time in he doesn't know how long, the click and rattle of the locks act as a score for the ache centered in his ribs.

Billy finally comes back to himself in full about a half-hour later, having spent the majority of that time trying probably way too hard to not focus on the pain rippling through him. He shuts the notebook he had left on the couch so he doesn't get sent back to being practically catatonic. Apparently having a record of every time you've fucked up will do that.

Ignoring pain is harder than it seems. Walking in restrained circles



around his room hoping that moving will distract him fails. Reading fails. Even smoking fails. At some point he throws the notebook on the couch across the room, watching it hit the wall and fall open with the pages bent over the floor. He starts thinking that he's just gonna have to pull an all-nighter when the locks are undone which is very out of the ordinary. After lights out, only Neil and Susan are allowed to be up and there's no way Neil would be unlocking his door so soon.

Billy still somehow isn't expecting his step mother to quietly open the door, but she does and all he can do is stop his pacing and stare at her like a dead fish. The petite woman in question has an armful of various things and waits in the doorway, wanting to be let in. She's kind of nice like that because she knows that knocking would be too loud by now.

The house, Billy's room included, is void of most forms of light. But what filters in from the street lamps and the moon is plenty. He flicks his head to the side, silently telling her to join him on the couch. She quickly nods in return before joining him there. It's only once they're seated that he can properly see what it is that she's holding as she places everything on her lap.

Her touch is gentle as she takes a washcloth with warm water to the fault line in his lip, cleaning it of anything that may have gotten in it. She then hands him a cold compress for his cheek before speaking in as hushed a voice as possible.

"Do you want me to use the peroxide?"

"Sure," his voice breaks halfway through the word. It's not the first time she's come by to help take care of his injuries, but it always makes him feel so broken. She cares enough to help put a couple of his pieces back in their places like the mother he's been missing. He can even remember doing this for his own mother at one point in his life.

Susan takes a cotton swab that's been dipped into the chemical gingerly to his lip. Even though he braces himself, Billy still sucks in a hissing breath at the sting. She whispers a quick apology as she continues to clean the wound. Making quick work of his lip, she

moves on.

“May I have your wrist?”

“Only if I get it back afterward. That’s my writing hand,” he jokes. He always has at least one joke for her when something like this happens. And Susan always has a smile to give back.

His step-mother, gently as ever, takes his wrist and sandwiches it between two splints- one on top of his wrist and one on bottom. Billy can feel his face betraying what is normally an iron will and softly smiling at the petite redhead before him. How such an angel came to marry his father, he’ll never understand, but he’s glad to have her. She wraps his wrist just the way he’s used to because they both know it’s probably another sprain.

He finds her mouth moving while lost in more thoughts than he would prefer, but he knows that she’s asking to move his shirt so she can see the damage and he complies, knowing she’s nothing like some of the mothers in this town.

Her hands are cold against his skin that apparently hid some California sun beneath its surface for the road. He looks down and sees the bruising against his ribs and stomach. Susan gasps. She never did get quite used to seeing stuff like this- stuff that couldn’t really be chalked up to some other thing like falling down the stairs or tripping over a box and hitting the table.

Billy wasn’t sure if anyone ever believed those because everyone knows he has no trouble with balance or spatial awareness. Hell, he’s practically hyper aware of both. Yet, he still tells them because someone not believing your lie is better than telling them the truth in a situation like his.

She places a bag of frozen corn that’s been wrapped in a washcloth against the worst of it. That explains why her hands had been so cold. The cold does send some relief washing through his aching bones. She avoids his eyes, but he can hear her clear her throat the way she does when she’s nervous to say something.

“I- I know we’ve never really been close.. But seeing you like this

always- it always hurts me to see. I still can't believe he calls himself your father. I- I despise the way he treats you, but- but I'm afraid and this is the only way I could think of to help you with-without making everything worse," she pauses to swallow what Billy assumes are the beginnings of tears and he takes that moment to speak.

"I know, Suze." He uses his now splinted hand to rub her shoulder until she takes a deep breath and gets up to go back to her and Neil's room, leaving most of what she brought with him.

"Thank you," he whispers as she goes, followed shortly in his thoughts by 'Mom.'

He almost thinks he had imagined what she said in return, but knows he didn't because of the sparkle in her eyes that he still finds despite the darkness around them.

"No. Gracias."

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Translations:

Are you my father?

No! I'm your sister...stupid brother

{explained}

Jesus fucking Christ

You do this to you, dude

{explaining} You do this to yourself, dude

No. Thank you

If you feel that you or a loved one are at risk or need any sort of help the US crisis hotline is 1-800-273-8255

In the UK, text SHOUT to 85258

The US domestic abuse line is 1-800-799-7233 (or TTY 1-800-787-3224)

The UK domestic abuse helpline is 0808 2000 247

Or, if you don't want formal help, please reach out to a friend or loved one or you can reach me (Jackal) @ brace\_myself on Instagram and Twitter. Stay safe everyone (: <3

## 4. Ay Mi Cabeza

### Summary for the Chapter:

Billy wakes up in the aftermath of his dad's rage and is faced with going to school and people caring at him

### Notes for the Chapter:

I'm sorry i procrastinated this for 3 weeks. I really didn't want to make you wait so long, but I also really didn't want to write Billy hurting. It's on the shorter side of my usual chapter length, but it felt like a good place to stop.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy reading this as much as I enjoyed writing it!

(1553 words)

Billy wakes up to immediate pain in his, well, everything. The light doesn't help, of course. Neil really fucked him up this time. Before he can even think about doing anything that isn't falling off his bed and dying, Billy reaches to his bedside and grabs the bottle of ibuprofen he keeps there for exactly this. He takes 6 from the bottle and washes them down with a flat beer and a cringe. Maybe dry would have sucked less. Especially for the reopened split in his lip.

He gets dressed, not without many aches and pains pulsing throughout his body. These are the sort of days he wears button downs because it doesn't require much movement of the arms. These are also the days when his hair takes the back-burner in regards to priority. He keeps going through his day as normal as possible, but not forgetting to take the splint and wrapping off his wrist before his dad sees it.

He picks up his lunch and starts heading to the car, not missing the slight extra weight to the bag than normal. Susan always puts in something extra when he's hurt. He appreciates stuff like that. Subtle stuff that says someone notices.

“Ten minutes, Max,” he calls as he heads out the door.

Going down the stairs and lowering himself into the Camaro is both easier and harder than he expected. There isn't really anything pressing going on with his legs, so it's not hard crouching into it. It's the having to twist and bend his torso to get situated that leaves him near wheezing from pain. Thank fuck he doesn't have seatbelts in this thing cause that might actually kill him.

Max joins him a couple minutes later, plenty of time for him to stop having breathing difficulties. She immediately turns to him.

“What's the damage?”

He sighs and knows she's gonna be stubborn about this one. “Lip, shiner, bruised ribs, and my wrist got fucked again.”

“I wish we could just fucking- ugh,” she cuts herself off with a sound of pure frustration.

He pulls out of the drive at the side of their house and makes his way onto the road to the schools, driving the speed limit for once. He's really not in the mood for that much noise and his day is already going to be filled with it.

“You know we can't. It would make shit worse for all of us. People don't give a shit about kids. ‘Specially not ones like me.”

“But that's so stupid! Why wouldn't someone listen if you told them your dad is a piece of shit that-”

“Because, Max! Because I give them more than enough reason to shrug it off and he acts like an upstanding citizen everywhere except the fucking house, okay? Just drop it. I'll be fine.” His head is pounding inside his skull like it's his brain being held captive and banging on the door to be let out. She doesn't get it. Nobody gets it. His life sucks and there's nothing anyone can do about it.

They spend the rest of the drive in relative silence. The only other thing that comes out of Max is a muttered “You won't be fine if you're dead, dumbass...” but he really doesn't have the energy to keep talking about it. Most of that is going to healing as best he can,

which is honestly, probably not much.

Billy already has his sunglasses on before he even gets close to the parking lot, not wanting to risk someone seeing just how fucked his face is before he doesn't have a choice. Walking into the building, one of the first things he sees is Tommy getting all up in Harrington's business. Something stupid probably, but still a bit weird that it's got both of them all worked up. He really can't bring himself to care, though. His head hurts and everyone here is fucking loud and the fluorescent lighting is the opposite of helpful.

He has to literally suffer through shop. The room has a natural echo to it with the addition of the way shop guys talk and all the machinery. Safe to say, Billy is fully prepared to commit homicide by the end of it because everything is just *too damn loud*. His head and his chest and his wrist are already making him feel like Julius Caesar on the senate floor and this is only making it worse. A lot worse. Because now it's like playing Julius Caesar in a production, but someone brought a real knife, and there's construction going on nearby. Needless to say, it sucks.

His saving grace is when he gets to Biology and his teacher can tell he has a migraine so she tells him to just close his eyes for a while and participate when he can. That's the great thing about science teachers. They have an understanding of the human body so they're usually super chill about stuff like that. Headaches, when kids are hungry, the need to use the bathroom, etc. Billy would be lying if he said he didn't respect it at least a little. And it honestly does help to be able to close his eyes in relative quiet and not feel pressured into doing things. He still does the couple of worksheets she hands out during class cause it's something to focus on that isn't the drilling pain behind his eyes or the shadows both in his vision and the unfortunate majority of his thoughts.

He has to brace himself for the lunch bell because he had allowed himself to relax a little during class. He quickly turns in the finished papers that had actually been meant for homework and heads out the door to go to the cafeteria and maybe meet up with Robin.

Turns out that plan isn't as maybe as he had thought because there she is, trotting up to him. Though she doesn't seem like the type to

have had a horse phase as a kid, unlike Max. When Robin comes to a stop she looks him over and lets out a simple “Youch” and yeah that about sums it up. Luckily she has the sense- or self preservation instincts- to not say any more about it. They catch up from the past couple days, some parts in English and some parts in Spanish. Especially in Spanish when it comes to anything concerning the fact that they’re both friends of Dorothy.

There does come a brief wane in the conversation in which Robin apparently can’t keep her mouth shut any longer and has to say something about the state Billy’s in.

“My mom used to be married to this asshole in California that did stuff like that. I mean I won’t completely understand it all, but I’ll listen if you ever need or want to talk to someone who won’t call the cops against your will.”

And Billy has no idea what to say to that because he’s not used to anyone outside of Susan or Max caring about him or what goes on within the walls of 5280 Cherry Road. So he does what he knows best. Even if it doesn’t feel right- being that part of himself to Robin- he turns bitter and harsh and yanks himself away from the situation so he can avoid the sheer idea of having feelings. Because he’s healthy like that. So he tells her to shut up and goes to his usual table populated by the usual people. The table where Tommy and Carol and the basketball guys are all so goddamn loud his ears feel like they might need sewing shut for even an ounce of relief.

Tommy takes in his face and his own falters for a moment before turning right back into the “class clown” superlative self. Billy knows there’s something else going on there, but he really doesn’t have the energy to care. He just wants to get through the rest of his day and go home so he can put his wrap back on for at least a couple hours until his dad gets home.

“Dude what happened?”

“My ass got beat, what’s it look like?”

“Jesus, Hargrove. What, was the other guy some sort of monster or something?”

Billy just pushed a breath through his nose, like a dragon was waiting beneath his skin. “Yeah. Something like that.” Before the bell rang again and almost had Billy jumping. He did what he could to stand and leave to avoid any other stupid questions, comments, or concerns. Billy just wants to get out of this goddamned cafeteria and go to his study hall so he can have the most quiet he’s had all day and enjoy it for fuck’s sake. Especially since he’d have to face gym class afterwards.

Billy makes it to his study hall and all he can think while he rests his eyes is that he said his dad is “something like” a monster. As if that’s not exactly what he is. He supposes it’s still those better parts of him that make it hard to think of him in that black and white image of good or bad- human or monster. People are complicated and fewer people probably know that better than Billy Hargrove.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Thank you for reading! I hope to see you in the next chapter.

I am fueled by feedback, so feel free to leave some.

-J

### **Author's Note:**

Thanks for reading, hope you stick around for the coming updates

(and since this is a shared account) -J